

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 IO-13 AID-05

OMB-01 EUR-12 /081 W

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R 010505Z DEC 76

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7397

USIA WASHDC

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 2812

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS PROP LA

SUBJECT: EXCLUSION OF AMERICAN CORRESPONDENTS

REF VIENTIANE 2807

1. AS REPORTED IN REFTEL, NO AMERICAN CORRESPONDENT RECEIVED A VISA TO COVER LPDR DECEMBER 2 NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATIONS ALTHOUGH CORRESPONDENTS FROM MANY OTHER WESTERN COUNTRIES DID. ACCORDING TO JOHN EVERINGHAM, FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC REVIEW CORRESPONDENT RESIDENT IN VIENTIANE, MFA PRESS OFFICE HAD ORIGINALLY AUTHORIZED VISAS FOR APPROXIMATELY TEN AMERICAN CORRESPONDENTS, INCLUDING SIMONS, ANDELMAN, THREE CBS CREW MEMBERS AND DENNIES GRAY (INCORRECTLY IDENTIFIED IN REFTEL AS DAVID GRAY). AUTHORIZATION HAD BEEN SENT TO LPDR EMBASSY IN BANGKOK. HOWEVER, KITHONG VONGSAY, CHIEF OF MFA PRESS SECTION TOLD EVERINGHAM THAT SUBSEQUENTLY A "COUNSELOR" HIGHER UP IN THE MINISTRY HAD ORDERED THE VISAS STOPPED BECAUSE HE DIDN'T WANT THOSE "JACKAPHATS" (IMPERIAL-ISTS) IN THE COUNTRY. THE COUNSELOR WAS NOT NAMED.

2. ACCORDING TO EVERINGHAM, KITHONG WAS PERSONALLY DISAPPOINTED BY THE REVERSE. KITHONG'S ASSISTANT TOLD
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EVERINGHAM THAT KITHONG WANTED TO INVITE ALL KINDS OF

JOURNALISTS INCLUDING AMERICANS TO INSURE WIDE MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE CELEBRATIONS. IF THEY WROTE UNFAVORABLY THEN THEY WOULD BE DENIED VISAS IN THE FUTURE.

3. COMMENT: KITHONG HAS OFTEN PLAYED "MR. SOFT" TO SOMEONE ELSE'S "MR. HARD". WHEN HE INFORMED NYT CORRESPONDENT DAVID ANDELMAN LAST SUMMER THAT HE WOULD HAVE TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY BEFORE HIS VISA HAD EXPIRED KITHONG SAID THAT HE PERSONALLY REGRETTED THE DECISION. IT WAS THE POLICE WHO HAD ORDERED ANDELMAN OUT FOR REASONS OF "PUBLIC SAFETY". SIMILARLY, WHEN HE INFORMED AFP CORRESPONDENT JEAN CLAUDE FIOL OF HIS EXPULSION, KITHONG ASSURED FIOL THERE WAS NOTHING PERSONAL IN IT. HE WAS BEING EXPELLED IN RETALIATION FOR SEVERAL UNFAVORABLE STORIES ON LAOS WRITTEN BY OTHER AFP CORRESPONDENTS. HOWEVER, IN HIS LETTER TO FIOL, CONFIRMING THE EXPLUSION, KITHONG CITED BOTH THE AFP STORIES AND FIOL'S OWN ACTIVITIES AS REASONS. WESTERN CORRESPONDENTS WHO DEAL WITH KITHONG GENERALLY REGARD HIM AS A PLEASANT BUT POWERLESS FIGUREHEAD WHO IS SIMPLY IMPLEMENTING DECISIONS MADE ELSEWHERE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CENSORSHIP, JOURNALISTS, THE PRESS, ANTIAMERICAN FEELING, VISAS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 01 DEC 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: vogelfj
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976VIENTI02812
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760444-0820
From: VIENTIANE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19761280/aaaacryz.tel
Line Count: 83
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 VIENTIANE 2807
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: vogelfj
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 01 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <01 JUN 2004 by ifshinsr>; APPROVED <22 SEP 2004 by vogelfj>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: EXCLUSION OF AMERICAN CORRESPONDENTS
TAGS: PINS, PROP, LA, (SIMONS, LEWIS), (GRAY, DAVID), (PEAGAM, NORMAN)
To: STATE USIA
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006